Creating Future Designers: It Starts in the Classroom

Sarah Prevette

In an exceptional example of Canadian innovation, Sarah Prevette has deconstructed the qualities that make entrepreneurs and transformed them into teachable components that are being transferred to the next generation of Canadian innovators. Here’s her prescription, based on that experience, for fostering innovation the way we teach other valuable knowledge and skills: in the classroom.

When we think about education, we need to be asking ourselves; how do we prepare kids for a rapidly changing world?

The current global landscape reveals an increasingly uncertain future, characterized by political instability and cultural intolerance. The colliding global factors of climate change, rising populism and scarcity of finite resources are dramatically reshaping the reality that today’s youth will face.
The time is now for Canada to re-vamp our education system and ensure that we are equipping students with the skillsets they need to adapt, adjust and problem-solve as required. We need to infuse our youth with the creative confidence and personal impetus to innovate the many solutions that will be required to address the problems of the future. This is Canada’s moment to showcase our unique capability for leveraging diversity of thought, skill and talent to foster a culture of innovation that focuses on solving the world’s most pressing issues.

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We cannot predict the jobs that today’s kindergarteners will be graduating into, or how their world might be altered by the widespread adoption of technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing or new technologies that have not yet been invented. However, we do know, without any shred of doubt, that automation will continue to change employment opportunities and will render many traditional roles obsolete.

We need not wait until our primary students make it into the job market to see the impact of the changes on our workforce. The WEF estimates that one-third of the skillsets required to perform today’s jobs will be “wholly new” by 2020. Our economy faces an immediate upheaval, and many participating in today’s workforce will quickly find themselves in need of major up-skilling over the next several years. The transformation is well underway and we have a responsibility as a country to proactively set up the infrastructure to support those affected by the transition.

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While there is a groundswell of support to teach kids to code, including $50 million in new funding from the federal government, it is but one small piece of a much larger puzzle. Many are beginning to recognize the benefit of teaching kids computational thinking but there is an ever-increasing need to also engage kids in real-world problem solving.

At Future Design School, we believe that it is time to raise the bar in every classroom across the country. We need to increase our expectations and realize that kids are capable of far more than the work that they are currently producing. We need to re-focus education on empowering student innovation and building entrepreneurial mindsets. With an uncertain future, cultivating resourcefulness and creative prowess should be placed at the very forefront of learning. There is a pressing impetus to look at the ubiquitous traits that make our entrepreneurs successful and determine how best to cultivate these attributes within every student from coast to coast.

Great entrepreneurs have fantastic imaginations, are wildly optimistic and see the potential that exists within every challenge. They tend to have insatiable curiosity and possess remarkable abilities to connect seemingly disconnected ideas. Successful entrepreneurship relies on gaining profound insight into the nuances of issues; developing deep empathy for the needs of others and building solutions that are iterative by nature. Innovative leaders are dedicated to ongoing experimentation, commit themselves to continuous improvement and understand that failure is

Education is under provincial jurisdiction, and our school systems are in need of reform.
We have seen amazing examples of teachers who, after engaging in our professional development, have overhauled entire grades and courses to implement new types of learning that foster future-ready skills.

“Education needs to be re-focused on fostering innovation. It needs to place a greater emphasis on the journey of learning, and less on the final outcome, more on the questions and less on the answers.”

Sarah Prevette teaches creativity, innovation, and design thinking to some of the country’s biggest business leaders. She is the founder of Future Design School, which transforms education by fostering entrepreneurship in a classroom setting.

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